

Testimony of Sally Rieger

S.B. 422 (Beth Bye's Water Bill)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on S.B. 422.

Because I understand that S. B. 422 is not yet in its final form, I am writing to support the intent of the bill. The deal between the Town of Bloomfield and the Niagara Bottling Company was made behind closed doors. As agreed to by Bloomfield, the deal disadvantages not only the citizens of Bloomfield but the residents of the other MDC towns. Also, to the extent that the deal results in less water being released down the East Branch of the Farmington River, which flows into the main stem of the Farmington, it is to the disadvantage of wildlife and to all the main stem river towns, especially those that withdraw their drinking water from aquifers near the river. When the river is low, groundwater moves from aquifers near the river into the stream bed. The result of this is to sustain the river, a good thing, but when drinking water wells are situated near the river, this directional flow reduces the amount of groundwater available to those wells.

S.B. 422 needs to protect the residents of MDC towns in drought situations. Under the current deal, Niagara Bottling Company would be using needed water for bottling and shipping, even out of the MDC service area. This allows the company to continue to profit and deplete the water supply while residents will be required to conserve water so that there will be adequate water for their basic needs should the drought be prolonged.

S.B. 422 should eliminate the ability of water companies to sell water at a discounted rate for large users such as water bottlers. This backward approach to pricing simply discourages conservation even under drought conditions when water conservation should be the goal of industry and citizens alike.

S.B. 422 should eliminate the Special Sewer Service Charge discount for water bottlers and other large users. Everyone should pay a fair share for sewer use. Those entities that are successful at water conservation should enjoy the associated cost savings.

S.B. 422 should not allow the MDC and Bloomfield to make a sweetheart deal with Niagara Bottling Company until the ongoing state water planning process is complete and there is an official State Water Plan. Prior to the completion of the Plan, it is inappropriate to allow deals between any water company and any large water user until we know that the basic needs of citizens and other existing customers can continue to be met.

Because the MDC has demonstrated that it cannot be trusted to deal openly and honestly with the citizens of Connecticut, S.B. 422 should reestablish a citizen's watch dog committee to follow the work of the MDC. There are many things that the MDC has done right over the years, but its effort to pipe water to UCONN and the current deal with Niagara Bottling Company demonstrate the need for better public scrutiny and understanding of this "quasi-governmental" organization.

Respectfully,

Sally S. Rieger

